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Lesson 2 - China
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The Yellow River – China Comes to Life

Purpose: To provide students with a brief history of China's Yellow River, its influence on the people of China, and its role in their Origin Story. In this lesson, students will make comparisons between the Yellow River Origin Story and the other creation stories read in class. Ultimately, students will write their own creation stories focusing on their own arrivals into this world and tying them to the cultures and regions in their family backgrounds.

Methods:

5 minutes	Settle and Lesson Introduction
10 minutes	Notes on History of the Yellow River
10 minutes	Website Tour of Yellow River and History
20 minutes	NPR Video
10 minutes	Review of the Origin Myths covered so far
5 minutes	Yellow River Origin Story
10 minutes	Students Answer Questions for Discussion
10 minutes	Teacher Guided Discussion of Questions
10 minutes	Journal Writing – Your Origin Story – Brainstorming

Objectives: *Students will be able to do the following:*

- glean the historical significance of China's Yellow River
- explore the Yellow River Creation Story
- compare and contrast Origin Stories from several cultures
- evaluate what elements drive an Origin Story
- create a modern day Origin Story about themselves

Assessment: *Students will be assessed through the following methods:*

- a completion grade for note taking
- a quiz grade over the Yellow River notes and videos
- a rubric will be designed to evaluate their creation story on
 - o development of story
 - o fluidity of writing
 - o elements of the supernatural
 - o relevance to their life/culture/environment
 - o creativity

Class: *Minority Perspectives - Colerain High School - Cincinnati, Ohio*
This course attempts to give students a wider literary and cultural view of the world in which we live. While traditional literature courses are obviously important for the literary foundation they have established, this course allows students to see where the written word has taken us in the modern period, and hopefully, inspires our students to tell their story, too.

Level: *English Elective*
Open to any student who has successfully completed English I.
Student abilities include Honors, Advanced, General, IEP, and Special Education.

Length: 90 minutes - Block Scheduling

Materials: Pens
Paper
PowerPoint/LCD
Journals

Ohio Standards:

Acquisition of Vocabulary:

3. Examine and explain the influence of the English language on world literature, communications and popular culture.
5. Determine the meanings and pronunciations of unknown words by using dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, technology and textual features, such as definitional footnotes or sidebars.

Reading Process:

1. Apply reading comprehension strategies, including making predictions, comparing and contrasting, recalling and summarizing and making inferences and drawing conclusions.
2. Answer literal, inferential, evaluative and synthesizing questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.

Reading Applications:

2. Analyze and critique organizational patterns and techniques including repetition of ideas, appeals to authority, reason and emotion, syntax and word choice that authors

use to accomplish their purpose and reach their intended audience.

3. Analyze the content from several sources on a single issue, clarifying ideas and connecting them to other sources and related topics.
4. Distinguish between valid and invalid inferences and provide evidence to support the findings, noting instances of unsupported inferences, fallacious reasoning, propaganda techniques, bias and stereotyping.
5. Examine an author's implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness and validity of arguments in public documents and their appeal to various audiences.

Writing Process:

1. Generate writing ideas through discussions with others and from printed material, and keep a list of writing ideas.
2. Determine the usefulness of and apply appropriate pre-writing tasks (e.g., background reading, interviews or surveys).
5. Use organizational strategies (e.g., notes and outlines) to plan writing.
6. Organize writing to create a coherent whole with an effective and engaging introduction, body and conclusion, and a closing sentence that summarizes, extends or elaborates on points or ideas in the writing.
7. Use a variety of sentence structures and lengths (e.g., simple, compound and complex sentences; parallel or repetitive sentence structure).
8. Use paragraph form in writing, including topic sentences that arrange paragraphs in a logical sequence, using effective transitions and closing sentences and maintaining coherence across the whole through the use of parallel structures.
9. Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers and style as appropriate to audience and purpose, and use techniques to convey a personal style and voice.
11. Reread and analyze clarity of writing, consistency of point of view and effectiveness of organizational structure.

The Yellow River History – Huang He (Huang means Yellow; He means River)

Students add to notes

- * The Yellow River is, in fact, yellow in color because of the mud and sand
- * It originates from the northwest
- * Divided into 2 parts – Hai He and Huai He flow into Bohai Sea north and south of Yellow River respectively.
- * Symbol of Henan (largest population of all Chinese provinces!)
- * “Cradle of Chinese Civilization” due to prosperity it brought to the region
- * Historically has caused many many devastating floods
 - So many, that is has been nicknamed “China's Sorrow”

Yellow River Creation Story

(Wang in NCTA Class March 4, 2009)

“The story goes that the people of China drank the water from the yellow river, and that is why their skin is a shade of yellow.”

Ask Students:

Why would the people want to explain the color of their skin?

Why would the people claim it was the river that gave them their color?

What is the significance of the river?

Culturally?

Financially?

Historically?

What other peoples we've studied used the land to explain their existence?

Are any of these stories true?

What drives people to know where they've “come from”?

Are people still searching for their origin?

Yellow River in China

(<http://www.chinahighlights.com/yellowriver/>)

The **Yellow River** or **Huang He** is the second-longest river in China (after the [Yangtze River](#)) and the sixth-longest in the world at 5,464 kilometers (3,398 miles). Originating in the Bayankala Mountains in Qinghai Province in western China, it flows through nine provinces of China (Qinghai, [Sichuan](#), Gansu, Ningxia, [Inner Mongolia](#), [Shaanxi](#), [Shanxi](#), [Henan](#), [Shandong](#) Provinces) and empties into the Bohai Sea. The Yellow River basin has an east-west extent of 1900 km (1,180 miles) and a north-south extent of 1100 km (684 miles). Total basin area is 752,443 km² (290,520 mile²).



The Yellow River is called the "the cradle of Chinese civilization", as its basin is the birthplace of the northern Chinese civilizations and is the most prosperous region in early Chinese history. But frequent devastating flooding, largely due to the elevated river bed in its lower course, has also earned it the unenviable name "China's Sorrow".

The Yellow River Valley (<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ANCCHINA/YELLOW.HTM>)

As in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and along the Indus River, Chinese civilization began within a major river valley. Modern China itself is a huge geographical expanse. Around 4000 BC, this huge area contained an almost infinite number of ethnic groups and languages. The course of Chinese history, however, is in part dominated by a single ethnic group and language. This history, in which a vast area populated by diverse ethnic groups became, over time, a more or less single culture, began in the **Yellow River Valley**.

The Yellow River is centrally situated in China (at least in its lower part). Directly to the south is the Yangtze River; south of the Yangtze is the West River; south of the West River is the Red River, much of which passes through modern-day Vietnam. Sometime around 4000 BC, when the area was much more temperate and forested, populations around the southern bend of the Yellow River began to practice agriculture. They sowed millet, but some time later, the Chinese began cultivating rice to the south, near the Huai River. These were a Neolithic, tribal people who used stone tools. We know also that they domesticated animals very early on, but they still continued as a hunter society as well. Remains of game animals are almost as common as domestic animals in these villages. We know almost nothing about them, for they left no records, and the life-blood of a people does not flow in the archaeological refuse they leave behind. We believe that tribal warfare was common and that they may have had some form of ancestor worship, but these are mere guesses.

The Yellow River

(<http://www.travelchinaguide.com/river/yellow/>)



Known as the mother river by all the Chinese people, the 5,464-kilometer (about 3,395 miles) Yellow River is the second longest river in China after the [Yangtze River](#). The headwaters of this mighty river lie in Kunlun Mountains in northwestern Qinghai Province. It runs through nine provinces and autonomous regions on its way to the Bohai Sea. It is not exaggerating to say that Yellow River is a melting pot, because there are more than 30 branches and countless streams feeding it through its course. The vigorous upper reaches of the Yellow River starts in Qinghai Province to Hekouzhen in Inner Mongolia. This magnificent river flows quietly, like a shy girl in this section, irrigating the farmlands and nurturing the people. Its middle reaches ends at Taohuayu in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province. Here the Yellow River splits the Loess Plateau in half, forming the longest continuous gorge in the whole drainage area of the river. The Yellow River's lower reaches ends in a delta on the Bohai Sea. It is agreed upon by almost all the Chinese people that the Yellow River is the cradle of Chinese civilization, the spiritual home of the Chinese people. It is the waters of the Yellow River and its spirit that nurture the whole Chinese nation. For thousands of years, the Yellow River has been admired by literary giants, artists, as well as by the common people. The Yellow River is not just two characters (in Chinese), nor is it just the name of a yellow-ochre-colored river. It bears special significance: the symbol of the Chinese nation, the spirit of the Chinese people and more importantly, civilization itself.

Neolithic (7,000 BC-3,700 BC), Bronze (3,700 BC-2,700 BC) and Iron Age Sites (770 BC), and so on can be found in the Yellow River's drainage basin, which had been the center of ancient Chinese culture since the Azilian (Middle Stone Age). Here, the story of three cultural heroes: Sui ren-shi who taught the Chinese to make fire by drilling wood, Fu Hsi who was the inventor of hunting, trapping and fishing and Shennong-shi who invented agriculture, was spread. It was these three legendary individuals that began the development of civilization in the Yellow River basin. After that, many ancient Chinese emperors, like [Emperor Qin Shi Huang](#), Genghis Khan (1162-1227, grandfather of Kublai Khan who is the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)) pushed the Yellow River civilization to a wholly new level of refinement, grace and spirituality which drew the attention of the whole world.

River Has Long Reflected China's Glories, Sorrows – NPR Video

(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17222640>)

by Rob Gifford



Andrea Hsu, NPR

The massive Sanmenxia Dam in Henan province was built in the 1950s. Across it are painted eight characters that read, "When the Yellow River is at peace, China is at peace."



Andrea Hsu, NPR

Zhang Juwen, 74, lives in Zhuzhuang village on the Yellow River. He once worked as a boatman, but the river is too shallow for that kind of work now.



Alice Kreit, NPR



Andrea Hsu, NPR

The massive South to North Water Diversion Project will bring billions of gallons of water from the Yangtze River in the south northward to Beijing and other parts of water-starved northern China. Zhang Tongli, head of the Henan province section of the project, says the project will take 30 years to complete.



Andrea Hsu, NPR

The Yellow River, shown here near Sanmenxia dam, has long been a reflection of the glories and the sorrows of China's past.

All Things Considered, December 14, 2007 · The Chinese used to compare the Yellow River to a dragon. They would say it had a head made of brass, a tail made of iron, but a waist made of tofu. The wobbly banks of the river have given way countless times over the centuries, taking millions of lives and earning the river the name "China's sorrow." In the last half century, though, things have changed along the river, as the government has taken steps to harness and control it.

Legitimacy and the River

On the massive Sanmenxia Dam, built in the 1950s, are painted eight characters that read, "When the Yellow River is at peace, China is at peace."

That phrase draws on a legend about a Chinese leader called Yu the Great. He was supposedly the first leader to succeed in controlling the Yellow River floods, and he went on to found China's first dynasty. He set an important precedent, of a Chinese ruler establishing his legitimacy — his right to rule China — by bringing the Yellow River under control.

To some extent, that viewpoint still holds today, but the problem has been reversed. The river has been tamed, by dams large and small. Now, the issue is not too much water — but too little.

Receding Waters

Zhuzhuang village sits beside the river, not far from the ancient city of Kaifeng. There, 74-year-old farmer Zhang Juwen shuffles through the piles of autumn leaves that line the dirt path outside his house.

For years, Zhang worked on the Yellow River as a boatman, shipping goods up and down it. But for the past couple of decades, the river has been too shallow for that kind of work.

Zhang used to live right on the bank of the river. His house hasn't moved, but the river has. Due to dams upstream, the waterway has receded to a channel along the middle of the river bed several hundred yards away.

But Zhang has no doubt about the dams.

"It's great that the water's controlled," he says. "Now, they just open the dam and let water out when they want it, and there are no more floods."

Diverting Southern Waters

The concerns of people living along the river have been soothed by the government's insistence that all is under control.

"Water levels on the river are not something that we ordinary people can do anything about," says Zhang Jun.

"That's a government issue. And they've begun a huge project to bring water from the south, the South to North Water Diversion Project."

The diversion project — a massive government undertaking — will bring billions of gallons of water from the Yangtze River in the south northward to Beijing and other parts of northern China.

Zhang Tongli, head of the Henan province section of the project, says it's the largest water engineering project in the world, with a price tag of many billions of dollars. It's not expected to be fully completed for another 30 years.

The channels will not feed into the Yellow River, but will pass under the river in specially built underground channels. The thinking is that by shipping water north, the strain of overuse on the Yellow River will be relieved. Like the Great Wall — or, more recently, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River — it's a classic imperial project, still possible under China's one-party system.

River Reflects Dream of Renewed Greatness

From this spot, the river heads silently toward the coast, lacking the industrial, demographic crescendo of the Yangtze River as it approaches Shanghai to the south. The Yellow River ends more with a whimper than a bang, exhausted as it reaches the sea. In fact, for three years in the 1990s, the river dried up completely before reaching the sea, alerting the government to the water crisis it is now trying to address.

The Yellow River has for so long been a reflection of the glories and the sorrows of China's past, and that is still true today. Even amid the renaissance of ancient cities along its banks in inland China, the river has become a part of the environmental emergency now threatening China's growth.

It's clear that balancing the need for growth with the increasing need to protect the environment will be one of the crucial tensions inside China in the coming decades. And perhaps managing that tension will be what decides whether China's dream of greatness again can be fully realized — the country's future reflected in the muddy waters of the Yellow River.

This story was produced for broadcast by NPR's Andrea Hsu.